



U.S. Embassy Belize

Media Advisory

January 9, 2004

U.S. Embassy Consular Section Reopens

All media houses are invited to the newly renovated Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy on Monday, January 12th at 8:00 a.m. In addition to viewing the new public areas, the media will receive a briefing and demonstration of the change in the non-immigrant visa application procedure. Immediately following the demonstration, the Consular Section will reopen to the general public at 9:00 a.m.

All applicants now will be asked to come in person to the Consular Section to apply for a visa and be interviewed. At the time of the interview, each applicant between the ages of 14 and 79 will be required to provide fingerprints of two fingers.

This new procedure is a result of the State Department's ambitious program to be compliant with the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 that stipulates that no later than October 26, 2004, the United States must issue to international visitors "only machine-readable, tamper-resistant visas and travel and entry documents that use biometric identifiers." This new finger printing process will facilitate rapid and precise identification and will therefore enable more secure processing of travelers at ports of entry.

The general public should also be aware that beginning January 5th, the U.S. Government initiated a new security program called US-VISIT. The new procedures will require most visitors traveling on visas to the United States to have two fingerprints scanned by an inkless device and a digital photograph taken by immigration officials upon entry at U.S. air and sea ports. The program is expected to minimize the possibility of document fraud and identify individuals who are on a terrorist watch list with the goal of preventing them from entering the country.

The Consular Section would also like to remind the general public that non-immigrant visa working hours are Monday to Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., beginning on Tuesday, January 13, 2004.

If you are interested in attending the demonstration on January 12, please contact Denise Nisbet at telephone 227-7161, extension 370, or by e-mail at nisbetdl@state.gov.

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